

The Road from Versailles: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and the Fall of the French Monarchy

By Munro Price

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What becomes of leaders when absolute power is wrested from their hands? How does dramatic political change affect once-absolute monarchs? In acclaimed historian Munro Price's powerful new book, he confronts one of the enduring mysteries of the French Revolution---what were the true actions and feelings of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette as they watched their sovereignty collapse?

Dragged back from Versailles to Paris by the crowd in October 1789, the king and queen became prisoners in the capital. They were compelled for their own safety to approve the Revolution and its agenda. Yet, in deep secrecy, they soon began to develop a very different, and dangerous, strategy. The precautions they took against discovery, and the bloody overthrow of the monarchy three years later, dispersed or obliterated most of the clues to their real policy. Much of this evidence has until now remained unknown.

The Road from Versailles reconstructs in detail, for the first time, the king and queen's clandestine diplomacy from 1789 until their executions. To do so, it focuses on a vital but previously ignored figure, the royal couple's confidant, the baron de Breteuil. Exiled from France by the Revolution, Breteuil became their secret prime minister, and confidential emissary to the courts of Europe.

Along with the queen's probable lover, the comte de Fersen, it was Breteuil who organized the royal family's dramatic dash for freedom, the flight to Varennes. Breteuil's role is crucial to an understanding of what Louis and Marie Antoinette secretly felt and thought during the Revolution. To unlock these secrets, *The Road from Versailles* draws on highly important unpublished and previously unknown material.

Meticulously researched and utterly fascinating, *The Road from Versailles* provides fresh insight into some of the most controversial events in modern history.

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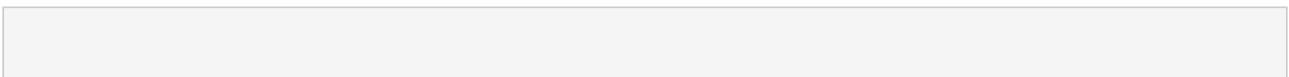
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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Historians have long argued about the true intent of Louis XVI regarding the French Revolution. Was the king prepared to accept a limited monarchy or did he intend to restore the old regime? Price, a specialist on 18th-century France, has unearthed a treasure trove of vital material—memoirs, diaries, official documents and correspondence—connected with the diplomatic representatives of the king, in particular the Baron de Breteuil, the king's prime minister in July 1789, when a Parisian mob stormed the Bastille. With the royal family in prison, Breteuil secretly traveled all over Europe with two goals: to help the royal family escape from Paris and to restore the absolute monarchy. Price takes us inside the world of 18th-century diplomacy, showing Breteuil's attempts to win financial and military backing from Austria, Sweden, Russia and other European monarchies. In June 1792, the royal family attempted its famous failed escape to Varennes. Breteuil eventually gained military support from Marie Antoinette's native Austria. Both Austria and Prussia invaded France in 1792, but were surprisingly defeated at the Battle of Valmy. The king was tried and executed in January 1793, Marie Antoinette shortly thereafter. What Price proves beyond doubt is that Louis had numerous chances to compromise with the revolution. He refused, choosing instead an ill-fated agenda of restoring absolute monarchy. This exhaustively researched study should be the definitive diplomatic history of the fall of Louis XVI. 16 pages of color photos not seen by PW.

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From Library Journal

In this engrossing work of historical scholarship, Price has managed to unravel a complex web of intrigue that has baffled historians since the demise of the ancien régime. Through brilliant detective work, Price (senior lecturer, Univ. of Bradford; *Preserving the Monarchy*) has uncovered documents that shed a definitive light on the French Crown's policy toward the revolution. Specifically, he has located among other significant archival materials a "large buff ledger" that itemizes secret missions that the Marquis de Bombelles undertook on behalf of Louis XVI. (Bombelles was the protégé of Baron de Breteuil, who was the French monarch's designated envoy to the Courts of Europe from 1791 until the collapse of the French monarchy.) Up to now, a paucity of documentary evidence has made it very difficult for students of the French Revolution to determine the Crown's true intentions during the critical early years of revolutionary turmoil. Price proves that the French king and queen made a concerted effort to undermine the work of the Constituent Assembly and to gain foreign support for restoration of royal authority. This definitive study moves well beyond such works as Michel Vovelle's *The Fall of the French Monarchy*. Highly recommended for both academic and public libraries.

Jim Doyle, Sara Hightower Regional Lib., Rome, GA

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From [Booklist](#)

Price plays historical detective in order to uncover the hidden political agenda of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette during the height of the French Revolution. Imprisoned in Paris by the radicals, the king and queen decided to play a dangerous game of intrigue and deception. Presenting a united and cooperative public face, they secretly conspired on a counterrevolutionary strategy designed to undermine the National Assembly and restore the monarchy to much of its former glory. Acting as emissary for the royal couple, exiled diplomat Baron de Breteuil attempted to negotiate with other European nations for their support in defeating the revolution. Conducting an extensive investigation to unearth correspondence between Breteuil and his most trusted agent, Price followed the paper trail to the State Archives of Sweden and Austria and to

a remote Austrian castle. Resurrecting a wealth of historical documentation, he has scrupulously detailed the previously unknown underground diplomacy of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, creating a significant contribution to the analysis of the French Revolution. *Margaret Flanagan*
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Users Review

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Edith Ward:

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Meredith Bailey:

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Julie Chambers:

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